1:Indiana U. S-4, 5(1954-5)1955 RG4 Estonia RG4

Annex "A," Subparagraph 1o,

Sociological Background

LABOR RELATIONS AND ORGANIZATION

466 [468] During Estonian independence relations between employer and employee were on the whole peaceful, and no large-scale strikes occurred. Although salaries were low, the cost of living was correspondingly low. The chief sources of friction were wages and working conditions. On the whole, the ministry of Labor and Welfare did a great deal to improve working conditions, passing several labor laws aimed at the protection of the workers, and sending Labor Inspectors to the various industries to see that the laws were carried out.

467 There were no trade unions in czarist Russia, so that Estonia in the independence period lacked experience in handling them, and the Communists,

467 taking advantage of the situation, attempted to dominate the unions. For this reason the institution of Factory Elders was initiated and, in larger industries, the Workers' Councils. The elders were openly elected by workers and were granted absolute protection against the employers. They served as mediators in obtaining higher wages and better working conditions for labor and usually succeeded where the trade unions had failed. Membership in the trade unions was not required in free Estonia and non-union labor succeeded in finding work as easily as did the union members. Although the trade unions had international affiliations, in Estonia they did not have such significance as they have in the United States today.

665 Labor's participation in politics was mainly through the Social Democratic Party and, in the

461 seek employment elsewhere without permission
466
of the director of the factory, and if he tries,
[462] the worker may be imprisoned. Women and
young people are not safeguarded by law from
heavy work. Women work in oil-shale mines
and other heavy industries on both day and night
shifts.

467 There are trade unions in Soviet Estonia and
each worker must contribute one per cent of
his wages to his union. But union duties are
reversed as compared to the trade unions of
the Western world; they protect the interests
of the government, organize Socialist competi-
tions in raising the productivity of labor, try to
reduce costs of production, exercise economy
of raw materials, and so on. Communist ideol-
ogy explains that in a Socialist society exploita-
tion no longer exists; therefore there is no need

1:Indiana U. S-4, 5(1954-5)1955 RG4 Estonia RG4

467 for the type of trade unions which exist in capitalist countries. The result is that nobody protects labor in the Soviet Union. The International Trade Unions League, which held its last meeting in Warsaw in December, 1954, has become the Communist fifth column. The U. S. S. R. and her satellites have refused to permit anyone to study the situation of the workers in these countries. Nevertheless, the Council of Enslaved Peoples of Europe, which held its meeting in June, 1955, in New York, decided to begin a study of this question.

SOURCES

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